

a community called ...

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[Number 19



“CUT IT DOWN.”

“*Let it alone this year also !*”—Thus spake the dresser of the vineyard in behalf of the barren fig-tree. Year after year the owner had sought fruit thereon, and found none. Despairing, at length, of rendering it fruitful, he ordered it to be cut down : “*Cut it down ; why cumbereth it the ground ?*” But the Vine-dresser “answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also : and if it bear fruit, well : and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.” Luke xiii, 6-9.

For you and me, dear friend, the Saviour spake the parable. We are the trees which his own hand has planted. From us he de-

sires and seeks fruit. When, at the close of the last year, he came to you with this intent, how justly, "after so long a time," might he have said, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" But the greatness of his compassion pleaded in your behalf, and cried, "Let it alone this year also!"

It was a merciful reprieve. This it was that kept you day by day in your lying down and rising up, in your going out and coming in. Like others, you may have been sick, but not unto death. Others wasted, fell, expired; but death had no commission against you. Disease and death were obedient to Him who said, "Let it alone this year also!"

"*And if it bear fruit, well.*" The tree had been planted not for its own sake, but for the expected fruit. For this the ground had been chosen, dug, enriched, inclosed; the tender shoot had been planted, watered, nourished, and pruned. For this, too, the tree is spared another year. He does not yet give it up. Another year it may yield abundance.

On the same condition, dear friend, your re-

prieve was granted. You were spared that opportunity might be given you to repent, and "bring forth fruits meet for repentance." Year after year you have received the kind attention of Him who made you. So abundant, so incessant, have the proofs of his care been, that he can now most justly ask, in respect to you, "What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?" Enough, and more than enough, he has done to have warranted long since the expectation of your conversion and fruitfulness. With the knowledge of your guilt and danger, he has shown you the way of pardon and salvation through faith in his Son, and has given you his word, which is able to make you "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus:" while at the same time his Spirit has urged you to press into the kingdom of Christ. In other cases fewer means have proved successful. Why, then, should not the Saviour have sought fruit from you a year ago?

But another year has been added to your year of probation; another opportunity given

you, with perhaps increased advantages to repent. And how have you improved it? It may be that, in some serious moment, you promised God that if he would spare you—"this year"—you would become his obedient servant. Have you remembered your promise? Have you fulfilled it? Has the fruit appeared? "*If it bear fruit, WELL.*" Then blessed art thou, "for thou hast found favor with God."

"*And if not.*" Can it be! Can you again have slighted the calls of mercy, trifled with the offers of grace, and turned away from all the admonitions and entreaties of your God? Has all his love, so rich, so free, so long continued, failed to melt your heart? Ought you not to have repented within the year? But it has gone, and you are yet in your sins, perhaps on the brink of the grave, without even a hope of heaven! There is less prospect than ever of your being reclaimed. Thousands, during that period—some of them, perhaps, your own friends and kindred—have, with no better advantages than you have en-

joyed, sought and found the Lord. Why has it not been so with you? "Wherefore," saith the Lord, "when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" O that you had been wise, had understood this, had considered your latter end! Then it would now have been well with you: "if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then—

"After that thou shalt cut it down." If, at the year's end, no fruit should be found upon the tree, the Keeper of the vineyard would give it up. And why not? Why should it any longer cumber the ground? The trial will then have been made—an ample trial. Nothing more can be done for it.

The year expires, and still there is no fruit. Who now will plead, "Let it alone another year also?" Not the Vinedresser—he gives it up: he pleads no longer. And if not he who then? None. It must perish. "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

Has not all this, dear friend, a fearful application to yourself? Your reprieve may be just about to expire. Again the Master comes

seeking fruit and finds none. You are yet in your sins. Labor has been bestowed on you without avail. Why should the reprieve be renewed? Why should he spare you any longer? Already he has done for you vastly more than you deserve—more than for multitudes who have perished in their sins. What, then, can *you* expect more? Who can say that more will be of any avail? that it would effect anything else than aggravation of your guilt, an increase of your condemnation? Why should he not also say of you, “Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?”

If that reprieve be not renewed, then the time draws near that you must die. Short as your life has been, you must die. Little as you have accomplished of your projects and purposes, you must die. Much as you may wish to live for the sake of yourself or others, yet there is much cause for you to believe that “*thus saith the Lord*, THIS YEAR THOU SHALT DIE!” Alas! how much have you been deceived in your expectations of earthly pleasure! How much reason have you to repent of

your idleness, folly, waste, thoughtlessness, disregard of duty—nay, of your whole life ! And how much have you to *do* ! If this must be your last year, month, or day, how precious to you must be every moment ! You cannot afford to lose a moment in idleness, or in mere worldly pursuits. Others may deem it needful to lay up for future years. Not so with you. If God has said of you, “ This year thou shalt die,” then the next year you will want neither house nor shop, equipage nor furniture, dress nor food. The grave will be your house, the dust your bed, the coffin your furniture, the shroud your dress, the worms your covering. Long enough have you labored for this world. Be persuaded now to labor for another. Discard all trifles. Be in earnest. Seek now the Lord. Resolve to make a desperate effort “ to enter in at the strait gate.” Set out for heaven. Begin this day. Press on, and on, let who will cry, “ Stop ! ” Like Bunyan’s pilgrim, stop your ears, and run, crying. “ *Life ! LIFE ! ETERNAL LIFE !* ”

It is not yet too late. If you delay no longer ; if you give over trifling ; if you forsake your sins, calling on God ; if you turn to the Lord with all your heart, casting yourself on his mercy through Jesus Christ ; if you do this it is not yet too late. "As I live saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked ; but that the wicked turn from his way and live ; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways ; for why will ye die ? " Then hear his voice. This day he renews the call. "To-day, if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart." This day resolve to turn to God. Let not the sun go down and leave you "dead in trespasses and sins." Let this very day be the date of your new birth. Let there be "joy in heaven" to-day on your account, while the shout ascends, "This my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found."
